

VZCZCXRO3987
PP RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHIL #1659 1031153
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 131153Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8426
INFO RUEHAAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 2241
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0107
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4143
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1266
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2037
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7021
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 8135
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0756
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2974
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 5585
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2043
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0336
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2166
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 001659

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/13/2017

TAGS: ASEC PGOV PREL PK

SUBJECT: ANOTHER COUNCIL MEETING, ANOTHER ROUND OF PROTESTS

REF: ISLAMABAD 1647

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) The Supreme Judicial Council met again on April 13 to continue hearings on "non-functional" Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. Initial media reports indicate the proceedings focused on the composition of the Supreme Judicial Council. Media outlets reported Chaudhry's head lawyer, Aitzaz Ahsan, argued three of the justices on the Council were unfit to rule in the case. The in camera nature of the proceedings was also discussed, but initial reporting suggested no decision was taken on the matter. The Council adjourned until April 18.

¶2. (C) Generally peaceful protests took place in major cities throughout Pakistan. In Islamabad, reports of protest numbers varied widely, from under 3,000 to as high as 7,000. Post noted similar reporting on the April 3 protests proved unreliable. Post estimated that at mid-day, between 1,500 and 3,000 political party activists and lawyers raised flags and chanted anti-government slogans on Constitution Avenue in Islamabad. (Note: Some protestors carried signs indicating support for Red Mosque leadership (reftel). End Note.) In Punjab, about 1,500 lawyers and party activists traveled from around the province to Lahore to join peaceful protests. Participants marched from the Lower Court to the Punjab Assembly building; they wore black armbands and tore down posters of Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi. In Karachi, despite a meager showing of protestors (200-300), the day's only widely reported violent incident took place when lawyers reportedly beat two journalists covering the gathering.

¶3. (C) Although the political parties remain essentially divided - they cannot agree on a coherent, collective course of action regarding the Chief Justice issue - they displayed better coordination in Islamabad during this round of protests. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, the minor but popular Tehreek-i-Insaaf, and a coalition of religious parties met in the capital city this past week to coordinate routes and times, which resulted in a mid-morning convergence on Constitution Avenue of three protest groups coming from three different directions. The Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians remained, as it has throughout the Chief

*Justice protests, less open to organizing joint protests than
the other parties.*

BODDE